

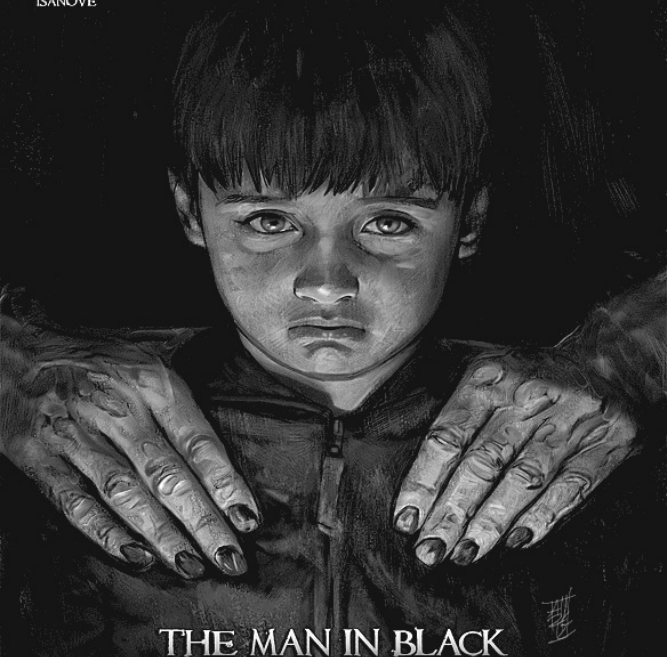
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STEPHEN KING THE DARK TOWER ~THE GUNSLINGER~ KING



THE MAN IN BLACK

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PREVIOUSLY...

Roland Deschain is the last gunslinger of the line of Arthur Eld. He pursues a being called the Man in Black who Roland believes holds the key to his destiny to reach the Dark Tower and prevent its destruction.

At a way station in the Mohaine Desert, Roland encounters a boy, Jake Chambers, who becomes his companion on his quest. Through an Oracle's premonition he learns: The boy is your gate to the Man in Black. The Man in Black is your gate to the three. The three are your way to the Dark Tower.

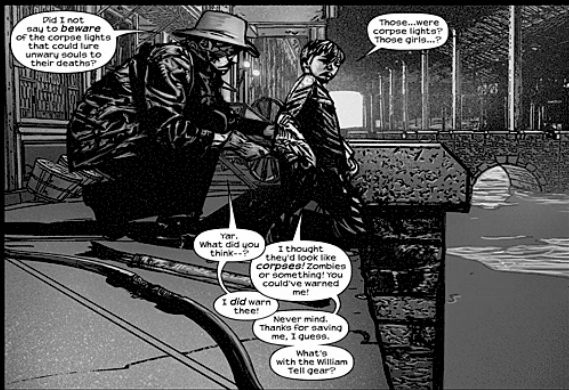
After defeating hordes of the Man in Black's mutated monsters, Roland and Jake make a dash through a decrepit subway station. There they notice that the closer they get to the Dark Tower, the more intertwined space, time and the various realities become. As Jake explores these strange surroundings he becomes enchanted by mysterious lights beneath the surface of water—but as it goes in this part of the world, things are not as they seem and Jake becomes ensnared within the grasp of corpse lights...



Jake, he don't even know or understand that he's in any danger.

He finds so much peace in the voices that called him down into the water that he's just drifting along.

So when Roland hauls his butt back to land, he's as puzzled as anyone can be.



Did I not say to beware of the corpse lights that could lure unwary souls to their deaths?

Those...were corpse lights? Those girls...?

Yar, what did you think--?

I thought they'd look like corpses! Zombies or something! You could've warned me!

I did warn thee!

Never mind. Thanks for saving me, I guess.

What's with the William Tell gear?

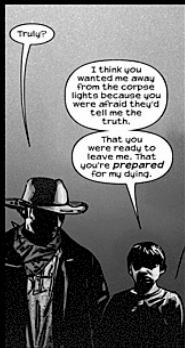


The guns in the shop were nonfunctional. This was the only thing of possible use.

Okay, well... just don't get ideas about shooting apples off my head.

Seems a waste of an apple.

Forget it.





How easy he could have bluffed the youngster. Again and again Jake's intuition had led him to this point, and again and again Roland had led him past it.

And how difficult could it have been? He had no friends but Roland.



You gonna answer me? Would you trade me for your Park Tower?



Truth is that Roland would likely sell his soul for the Park Tower. But not the best answer, do ya kennit?



Roland?!

Jake's cries echo endlessly through the tunnel.

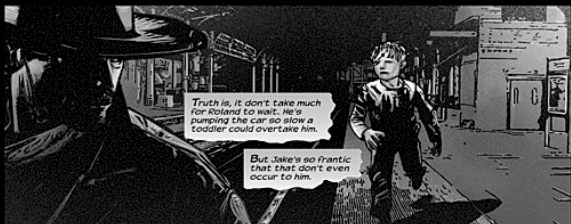
He can probably imagine it summoning more of the slow mutants from distant parts.



Even now he thinks he hears the scuttle of their fingers and overgrown toenails along the railway tracks.

He is sure the ragged rasping of their breath in their decaying chests is practically upon him.

Roland!
Roland, wait!



Truth is, it don't take much for Roland to wait. He's pumping the car so slow a toddler could overtake him.

But Jake's so frantic that that don't even occur to him.



So in a way, there was bluffing involved. 'Cept it was Jake doing the bluffing, and Roland called him on it.

He's won without firing a shot.



A rare enough way for a gunslinger to earn a victory.



The sound of the river has become very loud, filling their heads with its thunder.

Why are you having me pump? What're you doing?

Trying to get an idea of what lies ahead.

The bow isn't worth much no matter how much I restring it, but I can probably get it to fly about sixty yards.

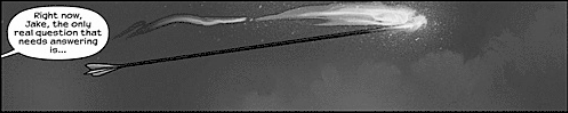


It went out, Roland.



Aye, it did. Means there's water, or at least moisture, up ahead.





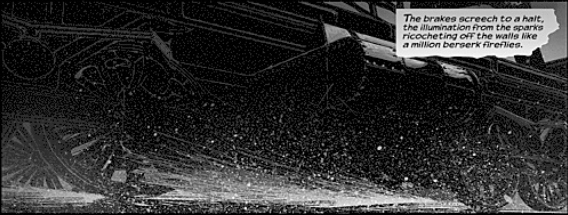
Right now,
Jake, the only
real question that
needs answering
is...



What's up
ahead?



Stop the
cart. Jake,
bring us to a
full stop!



*The brakes screech to a halt,
the illumination from the sparks
ricocheting off the walls like
a million berserk rifles.*





Very
brave of
you.

Like Hell.
I gotta weigh a
hundred pounds
less than you.



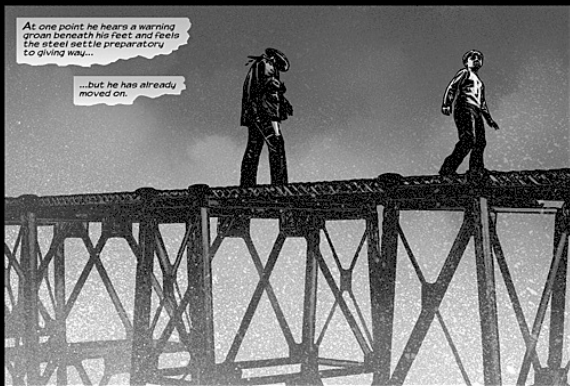
If you cause
this bridge to
collapse, I want
you *behind* me.



The cross-ties are
caked and pitted
with rust.

At one point he hears a warning
groan beneath his feet and feels
the steel settle preparatory
to giving way...

...but he has already
moved on.





A sudden gust of wind, hitting like a fist, sets the trestle to swaying.

Roland, with a fine slick of sweat covering his skin, barely manages to keep his balance.

Jake manages with far more confidence.

We're acrobats!

Look, Ma, no net! I'm flying.



Good that you can maintain your sense of humor, Jake.

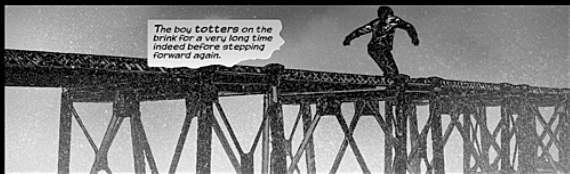


He glances back. Behind him, the handcar has melted into the general gloom.



Are we getting any closer to the end?

One would hope.









Roland!!!



Can you see and hear it
in your head? The swift
rattle of bootheels on
treacherous, rotted
steel...

The scream of
twisting, giving
metal...

...the lurch as his
body slides off
to the side...



...the grabbing
for nonexistent
handholds with
the fingers...



...and then down, turning
over and over, the warm
spray in his crotch as
his bladder lets go...

...the rush of wind
against his face,
pulling his eyelids
back...

...the dark water rushing
to meet him, faster,
outstripping even his
own scream...

Well, Roland's got just as good an imagination as you.

One look at his face and you could ken what was going through his mind.



But not for Roland was such a mundane ending to his quest, although some might think it would've been preferable... even merciful.

Roland!
You okay?

Yar.
Fine.



Three ties
out. Here. Right
here.

I'm gonna
jump.



The gunslinger sees him
silhouetted for a moment
against the daylight, an
awkward, hunched
spread-eagle...

Arms out as if, should
all else fail, there is the
possibility of flight.



You'd marvel at the boy's
fearlessness until you
realize one simple fact:



The boy thinks he's as good as dead.

Nothing lends wings to your feet like believing you're on borrowed time.

Geronimooooooooo!



The whole edifice sways drunkenly under the weight of Jake's landing. Metal beneath them protests and something far below falls, first with a crash, then with a splash.

Jake!

Jake, are you over?



Yar. But it's very rotten.

Like the ideas of certain people, maybe.



I don't think it will hold you any further than where you are now. Me, but not you.

Go back. I don't want you to kill me.



For the love of the man Jesus, walk.

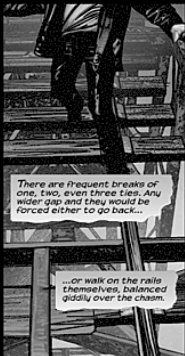
It's going to fall down for sure if we stand here palavering.



The boy walks drunkenly now, his hands held out shudderingly before him, fingers splayed.



The tracks, becoming increasingly rotten, angle upward.



There are frequent breaks of one, two, even three ties. Any wider gap and they would be forced either to go back...

...or walk on the rails themselves, balanced giddily over the chasm.



The glow of the daylight ahead takes on a color...blue...and as it comes closer it becomes softer, paler.

Not much more than ninety feet, Jake. Almost there.



Perhaps we'll have the Man in Black yet.

Perhaps in the bright sunlight, the evil flowers in his mind will shrivel and anything will be possible.



How you do turn a phrase.

The silhouette fills the light, eating it up, allowing only chinks of mocking blue around the outline of shoulders.

Hello,
Devs.

The Man in Black's voice echoes to them, amplified in this natural throat of stone...

...the sarcasm of his good cheer taking on mighty overtones.

He laughs above them, and the sound crashes around them, echoing like surf in a filling cave.

Metal rips and sloughs beneath them; the rails cant through a slow and dreamy twisting.





The boy screams, totters, a windmill again, arms gyrating through the scant air.



And the boy plunges...

...and one hand flies up like a gull in the darkness, up, up...



...and he is hanging over the pit, dangling there, his dark eyes staring up at the gunslinger in final, blind, lost knowledge.

Help me...

Help me, Roland...

And booming, racketing comes the voice of the Man in Black.

No more games. Come now, gunslinger. Or catch me never.





All the chips on the table. Every card up but one.



The boy dangles, a living Tarot card...

...the Hanged Man, the Phoenician sailor, innocent, lost and barely above the way of a stygian sea.

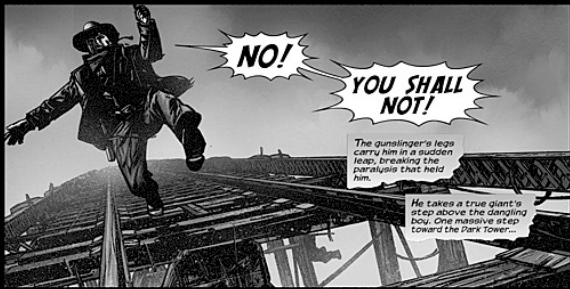


*Do I go?
Do I go and
forever take the
Dark Tower
with me?*

*Help me,
Roland!*



*Very well.
Then I shall
leave you.*



NO!

YOU SHALL NOT!

The gunslinger's legs carry him in a sudden leap, breaking the paralysis that held him.

He takes a true giant's step above the dangling boy. One massive step toward the Park Tower...



...the citadel that calls him without letup, consumes him, and makes him forget all else...

...if only for a moment.



But a crucial moment. One moment too long.

JAKE!!



Go, then. There are other worlds than these.



The boy's hold
rips away...

...and there is nothing, only
plummeting silence, for the
boy makes no cry as he falls.



The gunslinger stands drunkenly,
pallid as a ghost, eyes huge and
swimming beneath his forehead,
shirt smeared with the white
dust of his final lunging crawl.

I'd like to tell you that this is
as bad as it gets. That there
won't be further degradations
of the spirit ahead that would
make this seem like nothing.

But the truth is that this
ain't an end...but the end
of the beginning.



Almost.
Almost.

TO BE CONTINUED...

THERE
ARE
OTHER
WORLDS
THAN
THESE

Warning: This Article Contains Spoilers

Other than the iconic opening line of the Dark Tower Series ("The man in black fled across the desert, and the gunslinger followed"), Jake's final words—uttered as he tumbles to his death in the abyss below the Cyclopean Mountains—is probably the most famous sentence of the eight Dark Tower novels. The line is powerfully resonant, but what exactly does it mean in terms of Jake's experience, and what does it say about the structure of the Dark Tower universe?

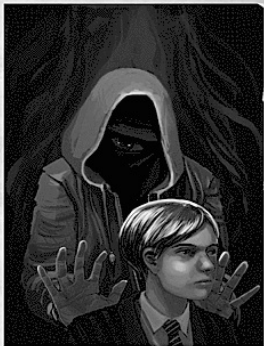
As every Constant Reader remembers, Jake was born in our world's New York City. Hence, he has already experienced more than one reality. He entered Mid-World on May 9, 1977, after being pushed in front of a blue Sedan de Ville by Roland's nemesis, the Man in Black. His doorway—out of Manhattan and into the Mohaine Desert's Way Station—was Death. Considering this, it is not so surprising that as Jake hangs over the yawning emptiness of the abyss, his terror is



gradually replaced by a philosophical acceptance of his fate. After all, he has died once already and yet remained to tell the tale!

As you may have guessed, despite Jake's apparent death at the close of this issue, his role in the Dark Tower novels is far from over. In *The Drawing of the Three* (Volume II of the series), Roland discovers three magical freestanding doorways on the beach of the Western Sea. The first of these doorways, which is labeled THE PRISONER, leads Roland to Manhattan 1987, and to a heroin addict called Eddie Dean. The second door, called THE LADY OF SHADOWS, opens on to Odetta Holmes (also known as Detta Walker), an African-American woman from Manhattan, 1964, who suffers from multiple personality disorder. But the third door, labeled THE PUSHER, leads Roland to the man who really pushed Jake in front of the Sedan de Ville—a psychopath named Jack Mort who is psychically controlled by the Man in Black. Although Roland knows that he must help his two new companions overcome their psychological disorders so that they can become gunslingers (something he accomplishes before the end of the book), Roland also knows that he has been given a unique opportunity. He can use the doorway called THE PUSHER to save Jake from not one, but two deaths.

While possessing the body of the Pusher, Roland does what no one is meant to do. By preventing Jack Mort from murdering Jake, he alters *ka*. As a result, Roland not only changes his own personal history, but he subtly alters the



histories of two worlds. Roland stops Jake from being hit by a Sedan de Ville, but by so doing he returns the boy to a world where he no longer belongs, and he simultaneously erases the events of his own life. In essence, by the end of *Drawing*, we realize that the events of *The Gunslinger* could never have happened, since Roland could not have traveled across the Mohaine Desert or beneath the Cyclopean Mountains with a boy who had never existed in his *where* or *when*. Although Roland's desire to save Jake is admirable, the consequences of his altruistic actions are dire.



When Roland changed history by saving Jake's life, he created a split in the time/space continuum. In Jake's new New York timeline he had never passed away, and in Roland's altered reality Jake had never existed, yet both Roland and Jake retain ghostly memories of their earlier adventures. In fact, they are each tortured by two conflicting sets of memories—one where Jake entered Mid-World, and one where he didn't. By the time we meet Jake again in *The Waste Lands* (Volume III of the Dark Tower series), both he and Roland are suffering from a kind of psychosis brought on by these double memories, albeit they suffer in different worlds. The psychosis is cured when Roland—with the help of his two new ka-mates—creates yet another doorway-between-worlds. Jake's second Mid-World birth takes place on June 1, 1977, the day after he discovers a magical rose growing in a vacant lot located on 2nd Avenue and 46th Street, a rose which turns out to be our world's manifestation of the Dark Tower.

Luckily, Jake's second entry into Mid-World is not as traumatic as his first, though it is still difficult. In New York 1977, Jake's doorway into Mid-World is located in a haunted mansion in Brooklyn. In Mid-World, it is located in a Speaking Ring sitting along the Path of the Bear-Turtle Beam. (Ironically, this Speaking Ring is very similar to the one in which Jake and Roland confronted a hungry succubus in the foothills of the Cyclopean Mountains.) Although the two doorways have different appearances, they are both guarded by demons. While Susannah Dean (a woman born of the union between Detta and Odetta) traps the Speaking Ring Demon, Eddie draws a doorway for Jake. With Roland's help, Jake eludes his door demon and reenters Mid-World.

But Jake's experience of parallel worlds is far from over. In *Wolves of the Calla* (Volume V of the Dark Tower series), Roland's tet comes into contact with Black Thirteen, the most evil of Maerlyn's magical seeing spheres. Black Thirteen's special magic is its ability to

make people travel to-dash, or through the void spaces between worlds, to other *wheres* and *whens*. While they sleep, Eddie and Jake are transported back to 1977 New York, where they follow Jake's younger self. They also discover that the vacant lot, wherein grows the magical rose, is being threatened by an evil corporation owned by servants of the Crimson King.

In *Song of Susannah*, Jake uses his

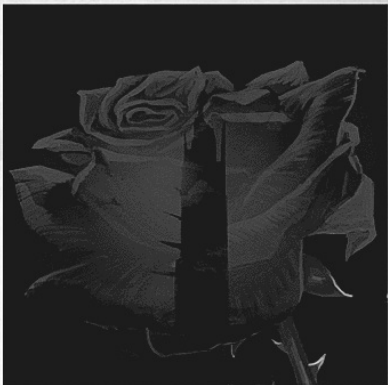


powerful psychic abilities to help the mystical Manni sect open yet another doorway-between-worlds. This time it is a freestanding doorway located inside Doorway Cave (formerly the Cave of Voices). Through this doorway, Jake, Jake's pet bumbler, and Father Callahan travel to 1999 New York, where they must rescue Susannah Dean from a kidnapping demon called Mia.

Although all of the doorways we have discussed so far are magical doorways, Mid-World also has its fair share of mechanical doorways-between-worlds.

These mundane portals were created by the technological wizardry of the Great Old Ones. Unlike magical doorways which can lead to anywhere (depending upon the needs of their users), mechanical portals always open onto the same where and when. In *The Dark Tower* (Volume VII of the Dark Tower series), Jake, Roland, and the other members of their tet use one such doorway to reach Thunderclap Station, deep in End-World. Soon after they discover that Mid-World is full of mechanical doorways. Below the Fedic Dogan alone there were once 595 working doorways that led to places and times all over the known (and unknown) worlds.

As early as *Wolves of the Calla*, we begin to suspect that the many levels of the Dark Tower contain not just other worlds, but also multiple versions of *our* world. In Eddie Dean's New York, Co-Op City is in Brooklyn, not the Bronx. In Susannah Dean's



version of Manhattan, the A train stops at Christopher Street Station, which it doesn't in ours. But despite their differences, each of these New Yorks still *is* New York, and each one contains alternate versions of the people who live there. Hence, even when Jake dies in one world, another version of him continues in a parallel reality. Perhaps his last name will be different, or his eyes will be brown instead of blue, but he will essentially be the same boy, with the same shining ka. I don't know about you, but I find that both fascinating and comforting.

Until next month, my friends—

Long days and pleasant nights!

Robin Furth

ILLUSTRATIONS BY STEPHANIE HANS

ART EVOLUTION FROM SCRIPT TO COLOR

PAGE 17

46. Jake walks drunkenly now; his hands held out shudderingly before him, fingers splayed.

47. The trestle is much more rotten now. There is a break of two ties . . .

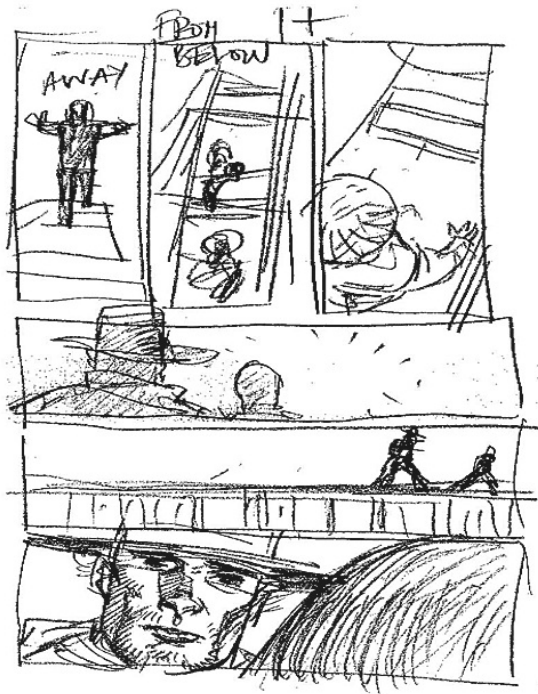
48. Then another three. The gunslinger fears that they will either have to go back or walk along the rails themselves, balancing giddily over the chasm.

49. But now, the daylight up ahead has taken on a true, blue color. Only fifty yards left. Or is it a hundred? He can't tell.

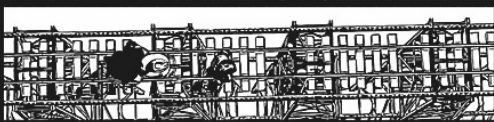
50. They walk now, staring at their feet, crossing from tie to tie.

51. Roland looks up. Daylight, so close! Only ninety feet away. "We're almost there, Jake!" He cries. "Almost there . . ."

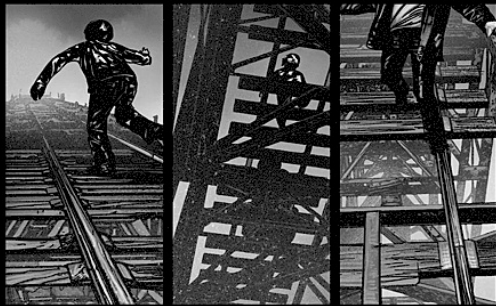
THUMBNAILS BY ALEX MALEEV



INKS BY ALEX MALEEV



COLORS BY RICHARD ISANOVE



COVER SKETCH FOR THE MAN IN BLACK #4 BY ALEX MALEEV



NEXT: "THIS IS NOT THE BEGINNING, BUT THE BEGINNING'S END."





The Man in Black flees across the desert with the gunslinger Roland in close pursuit. In his travels, Roland has battled the possessed and the demonic, while meeting an unlikely ally named Jake Chambers, a young boy from another earth. Now, as the distance between Roland and the Man in Black diminishes, Roland is met with a chilling prophecy: he will find the Dark Tower and obtain his vengeance, but will pay for it with the blood of young Jake.

From the renowned creative team of Robin Furth, Peter David, Richard Isanove, and Alex Maleev comes the final chapter in the Dark Tower saga. With fantasy, horror, revenge, drama, and a dash of the Old West, such a story could only come from storytelling legend Stephen King.

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FOR STRONG LANGUAGE & SEXUAL CONTENT